

A death trap for wildlife

Uncovered electric line running through Lawachhara killing its endangered species

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

A connecting electric line runs right through the Lawachhara protected forest in Moulvibazar's Kamalganj upazila. The power line packs 33 kilovolts, putting the forest's wildlife in peril, as the animals often come in contact with it.

In fact, the number of injuries or fatalities is increasing by the day. Almost every month, there's news of at least one or two endangered species of wild animals injuring themselves or dying due to the uncovered power line.

Shamsul Haque, joint convener of Lawachhara Bon O Jibobaichitra Rakkha Andolan, said a lot more animals get injured or die like this than the stories that come to light. "Wild animals need a corridor, as they come out from the jungle at night in search of food."

"As the electric line is not protected by non-conductive covers, the animals get



electrocuted when they come in contact," he said.

"We have already asked the forest department and rural electricity office many times to install suitable covers for the wires, but nothing of this sort has been arranged yet," Shamsul said.

According to the Department of Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation, a meeting was held on August 2, 2016, chaired by the director general (administration) of the Prime Minister's Office, in this regard.

At the meeting, a decision was taken to replace the uncovered wires with rubber or other non-conductive electrical wires.

At that time, a letter was sent to the Palli Bidyut Samity regarding the decision. But this is yet to materialise.

"I have been hearing for more than a year that the authorities will install covers on the power line for the animals' safety," said tourist guide Saju Marchiang, a resident of Lawachhara Punje.

Contacted, Ziaur Rahman, general manager of Moulvibazar Palli Bidyut Samity office in Sreemangal, said he has received the letter.

If possible, after surveying, steps will be taken, he added.

Meanwhile, the forest department has obstructed the installation of electric poles and providing electricity connection in illegally constructed localities in different parts of the forest.

According to the Forest Act 1928 (Amended 2000), a letter was sent to Moulvibazar Palli Bidyut Samity mentioning that installation of electric poles, laying of lines and providing electricity connection without permission of the forest department are completely prohibited, said Shyamal Kumar Mitra, assistant conservator of forests, Department of Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation, Moulvibazar.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, divisional forest officer, said in the interest of conserving the overall biodiversity in Lawachhara National Park, it is vital to replace the power line's covering with rubber or non-conductive coating.

The PMO has given out some instructions to the relevant authorities in this regard, he said.

If the rare animals keep dying at this rate, someday they'll simply go extinct, which will severely upset the balance of the area's ecosystem.



Every day, the many wild species residing in Lawachhara protected forest are at risk of getting electrocuted by the line that runs across the area. It has been several years, but authorities still haven't followed through with their decision of replacing the existing wires with non-conductive ones. PHOTO: STAR

Where risky way is the only way

Due to lack of alternatives, pedestrians are forced to use unfinished footbridge to cross highway



PHOTO: STAR

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH, Savar

Owing to the failure of contractors to finish the construction of a foot-over bridge on time, pedestrians on the Dhaka-Aricha Highway's Joypura area, are risking their lives to cross the road through the unfinished bridge, which doesn't even have safety railings.

According to the RHD in Manikganj, the construction firm -- Jitu Enterprise -- started construction work of the footbridge in Joypura bus stand area under Dhamrai in early 2001.

But even after the construction deadline expired in December 2021, the bridge is yet to be finished. During a visit to the area on Sunday, this correspondent found road divider pillars set up on the highway to prevent pedestrians from crossing the road on the ground.

This is why even though the overbridge is unfinished, pedestrians, including school and college students, have to use it to cross roads.

Arafat Hossain, a seventh-grade student at a

local school, said they are using the footbridge under risk as they have no other way to cross the highway.

The next footbridge is almost 1.5km away. "I'm aware it is risky to cross the road this way, but how else do we cross the highway?" he asked.

Locals said pedestrians have been using the bridge for the last 15 days under immense risk.

A local, who runs a shop right beside the bridge, said neither the construction firm nor the authorities have taken any safety measures for pedestrians yet. "Who will take responsibility in case of an accident?" he asked.

Contacted, Sifat Ahmed, project manager at contractor Jitu Enterprise, said the bridge's railings will be installed very soon. "We are also working on taking safety measures for pedestrians," he said.

Md Gaus-ul-Hasan Maruf, executive engineer of Manikganj, RHD, said the construction of the footbridge was supposed to be over by now.

He said they will investigate the matter.

COPS KILLED IN ROAD CRASH

Who was driving the car, police or arrestee?

Conflicting claims about driver of vehicle seized with yaba cause stir

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

The car that plunged into a roadside pond on Monday, killing two police sub-inspectors in Narayanganj, was seized earlier that day with 42,000 yaba pills.

An assistant sub-inspector was injured and a person, arrested with the pills, fled after the accident at Dattapara around 6:30pm in Sonargaon upazila. The incident created a huge sensation, since police cannot use vehicles seized with narcotics without court directive.

Although police said one of the officers was driving the car, some media reported that the arrestee was driving it. However, The Daily Star could not verify the claim.

Zaidul Alam, SP of Narayanganj, said the police officials made a mistake. The deceased are sub-inspectors Shariful Islam (35) and Kazi Saleh of Sonargaon Police Station. The injured ASI Rafiqul Islam was undergoing treatment at Rajarbagh Police Hospital in Dhaka.

The three had arrested one Alamgir, who was coming from Cox's Bazar with the yaba pills, on Meghna Bridge on Monday morning. Police seized his car and drove it with the accused to the office of the SP for a press briefing, said SP Zaidul.

After the briefing, they were returning to Sonargaon Police Station, and SI Shariful was driving the car, the official said. The vehicle fell into a pond while giving way to another car near the station, said Mostafizur Rahman, additional superintendent of police in Narayanganj.

The accused fled the scene immediately after locals rescued them by breaking the car's window, said SP Zaidul. "We are trying to arrest him [the accused]."

Replying to a query as to why the accused was being taken to a police station in the seized car, the SP said, "It was not the right thing to do. It was a mistake."

HC orders speedy trial of graft case against Bodi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the lower court concerned to expeditiously finish the trial proceedings of a corruption case against former Awami League lawmaker from Cox's Bazar-4 constituency Abdur Rahman Bodi.

The ACC filed the case in Chattogram on December 17, 2007 against Bodi on charge of amassing wealth of Tk 66.7 lakh beyond known source of income. Yesterday, the HC rejected a petition filed by Bodi seeking a stay on the trial proceedings.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman rejected the petition as it was not presented properly.



Lines of people were seen in front of Chattogram General Hospital yesterday, waiting to get inoculated. Although vaccination starts at noon, they stand in queue from the morning, so they can get the jab before hospital authorities call it a day. While waiting, however, social distancing falls by the wayside, as the lines get increasingly huddled. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

NIKO GRAFT CASE

Hearing adjourned till Mar 8

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday adjourned the hearing of the Niko graft case against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and eight others till March 8.

Judge Sheikh Hafizur Rahman of the Special Judge's Court-9 of Dhaka passed the order after a petition was filed with the court on behalf of Khaleda, seeking an adjournment, Advocate Masud Ahmed Talukder, one of her lawyers, told The Daily Star.

Masud represented Khaleda, who is sick, at the court. In the petition, Masud told the court that they would complete the hearing on behalf of Khaleda on the next date of hearing.

Among the accused, Giasuddin Al Mamun is now in jail, while the rest are on bail.

During the hearing, Mamun and two other accused were present at the makeshift court of Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj.

